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EBEN.—A TRUE STORY.

By MRS. OLIPHANT.

IN SIX CHAPTERS.—CHAP. I.

"Now, mother, ye'll aye get every month's wage; you're no to gang on slaving and toiling the way ye've done since ever I mind. I'm done with schooling, and a' the charges I've put you to now; and, mother, if ye would give me comfort in ae thought at sea, let it be that you're weel and at ease at hame, and that I'm some use in this world."

"Muckle use, Eben, muckle good, my bonnie man, and far mair may ye be when your auld mother's gane to her rest," said the weeping old woman. "But what do you think I'm caring for ease and comfort, and my ain only laddie at the sea?"

"Mother, I'm meaning nae reproach to you; but I'm nameless and friendless now this day, and carena if I never saw a mortal face again but your ain," said the young man, with a burning cheek and a strong swell of his broad breast, almost like a sob. "If I'm ever spared to come back, I'll come with a name no man shall scoff at; though I'm sure wherefore I should care, that have nae mortal to think of me, I canna tell,—only it's hard to be a mock to fools and bairns. But, mother, mind it was my only wish—I had nae other—that ye might take rest and comfort the time I'm away."

"You'll have many another wish, Eben. I ken the first cross is aye hard; but mony a braw wish will ye have and win before you're as auld as me," said the mother, fondly smoothing down with her wrinkled hand the sleeve of his blue jacket. "But I'll mind myself; auld folk win through easier than young, and there's naeboddy but what's good to me, Eben. Oo ay, far better than I deserve."

They were standing within the single room of a very humble cottage, near to the rocky beach of one of the little sea-ports of the coast of Fife. In the centre of the floor stood Eben's sea-chest, cumbering the small apartment. The fireplace was not so bright as its wont; the potato-kettle hung idly over the expiring fire; the window, with its thick, small, greenish panes, gave dimness and shadow even to the summer sunshine, which flashed like gold upon the sea; and the door, which generally admitted light and sounds of human fellowship to this poor little dwelling, was now closed upon the sacred leave-taking of the mother and the son. The mother, an old and failing woman, stood beside her departing adventurer, still smoothing the sleeve of his new jacket with one hand, while with the other she vainly strove to conceal her tears and quivering features behind the check apron which she held to her face. The son, with trembling lip and a cheek of hot and proud excitement, supported her on his arm, and vainly tried to command and master his feelings. Eben was only twenty, and a match for any hereditary sailor or fisherman of all those amphibious coasts. A candid manly brow, and eyes as clear as the depths of a winter sky, were not belied, but only gained a deeper interest in their honest comeliness from the more sensitive lines of the mouth; brave and honest and manful, you could guess from this face of Eben's that the sorest burden in the world to him was shame. But God who made the heart gave the lot withal, and shame *was* Eben's burden. His father had sinned against man's law as well as God's, and died in banishment, years ago, a disgraced criminal; and his mother, too faithful to the husband whom she would not condemn, had shared in the stigma of his guilt. His name was a disgrace and reproach to him, the cross and heaviness of his life. Repented sin and humblest penitence had not taken away, and could not take, this shadow from his life. Of saddest verity were these words of his; his name was his dishonour.

Some one knocks at the door. It is his shipmate to help him with his sea-chest. The *Traveller* lies in Anstruther harbour, hosts of little sunshiny waves dancing about her, like a crowd of children inspecting at all points the departing voyager; and the water glows and brightens on the

Firth, and the west wind stirs the ebbing current on these low rocks, and all is fair, both wind and tide, to carry her out to sea. The sun shines on the fluttering pennon at her mast, on the white sails curling out upon the yards, on the deck where seamen, new embarked, throw parting salutations to these groups of friends and neighbours who have made the *Traveller's* sailing the occasion for a holiday. You may see the faltering courage of some betrothed maiden, or the less restrained tears of mother or sister, giving an underground of sorrow to the sparkle of gaiety and pleasure which is over all this scene. But the excitement of it is sad only to a few; enterprise and adventure, good hope and courage, make the hearts of the crew as buoyant as is their hand-some craft upon the joyous sea; and the landmen and women on the shore speak with a certain tenderness and confidence of the *Traveller*, which is an animate thing to them.

But sick on poor Jean Rhymer's heart flashes the brilliant sunshine, and that sweet laughter of the waves, which is music to the rest, is but elvish mockery to her. Holding her son's arm with both hands, and submitting to his guidance blindly,—for weeping is all the use her poor eyes are fit for to-day,—she goes down sadly to the shore, there to commit him out of her own most tender keeping to the keeping of that great Father who is the only father Eben can ever know; and with a sorer heart than any other mother of all these assembled matrons, poor Jean prays prayers for him which are hardly to be restrained within her own soul, but drop from her moving lips in faint inarticulate words, as she draws nearer and nearer to the pier and to the sea.

"Eben!" with a stronger hold his mother clutches his arm, as he is called by an eager voice behind; but Eben himself, with startled haste, pauses and turns round. They are pursued by a woman, brave in a gown and petticoat of new calico, with lace on her cap, and a ribbon to tie it withal,—all matters of rank and distinctive costume, removing Mrs. Horsburgh to a place exalted and lofty, very far above poor old Jean Rhymer's printed short gown and blue woollen petticoat. "Come west three minutes, I'll no keep ye langer; and the *Traveller* doesna sail for half an hour. The gudman's away at St. Andrew's. O, Eben, come!"

His mother does not know how it is that he looses so soon from his arm her hands, which clasp and twine upon it as if they never could be parted. But in a moment she is standing alone, looking out upon the sunny beach and on the pier, where the *Traveller* sets her sails in preparation, while already there is a stir and clustering of sailors round the capstan, as if to raise the anchor. Terror that he will be too late mingles in poor Jean's mind, with a little bitterness to find herself forsaken thus on the eve of their farewell. "I maunna find fault—it's just natural; and I'll no vex my laddie his last hour at hame," says the poor mother, as failing and trembling she stands on the roadside eagerly looking for her son's return; but by and by, as she sits down to wait for him, these are hot and heavy tears which fall upon the wayside grass.

In the mean while, Eben, far outstripping his guide,—who has a certain dignity to keep up, not to speak of the burden of double his years,—rushes on, his face all glowing with sudden joy and pleasure, to a house which, built upon a slope, is a story higher in this aspect behind than in its respectable front, which looks primly through five square windows upon the main street of Easter Auster. The door is open, the way free before him; and in a moment Eben stands beside a pale, pretty, trembling girl of eighteen, who does not know whether to be most ashamed or joyful at his hasty approach.

Poor Annie Horsburgh! it is not her fault that Eben has been moved to admiration first, and then to manly reverence and secret tenderness, for that sweet womanly face of hers, with all its ready sympathies. It is not Annie's fault that of all her bolder wooers no one has taught her to believe in the love which she dares not think herself capable of inspiring, but that Eben's eyes have given her

warrant of it, not to be disputed. But Eben is only poor sad Jean Rhymer's son; and Annie Horsburgh is the sole daughter of John of the same name, the most thriving burgess of this little rotten municipality. However that may be, certain it is that Annie's long-prolonged and silent weeping has prompted this remedy to her soft-hearted mother, and that the cure is greatly efficacious, and succeeds as no other cure could have done, had the good man not been happily away from home on the *Traveller's* sailing-day.

What does he say? Annie cannot tell, as with sad smiles and tears, which have a little struggle together but at last coincide and mingle in a long weeping revie, she sinks into her seat in the window, and turns her eyes again towards the *Traveller*, which seems to spurn the shore, already impatient of delay, and towards that flying figure hastening to the pier. But by and by the words come back again; many a day and many a night when Eben is on the high seas, far from home, she will say them in her heart.

And now farewell, mother; farewell to all familiar faces which come to look like friends in this last glance; farewell brave Firth and gentle hills of Fife! the anchor is up, the last cheer rings high in the sympathetic skies. Clouds, like reflections of our snowy canvas, start forth with us on the heavens. God keep the homes we leave behind,—this is our prayer,—well knowing that many a heart besieges heaven this moment for care of us. And now the land glides behind us, stealing away with its tints of ruddy sunshine into the evening clouds, and the night falls pale and solemn on our watch and on the sea.

CHAPTER II.

Lift the latch softly, uncover your head—age and poverty and grief dwell with this solitary woman here. The little room is very bright, well swept, and in order; its morsel of fire glowing red and breathing free, as fires only do under careful hands; its single row of plates and cups upon the shelf glancing to the light, and every thing else making it manifest that gloom and disarrangement do not belong of necessity to the very poor. The mistress of the house sits between the window and the fire alone; she is making a cotton gown of the scanty proportions which are "the fashion" in this time, and of such brilliant hues as may become the blooming fisher-lass for whom it is intended. When you look at the composed face of Jean Rhymer now, you see that she is not so old as your first opinion made her. Fifty years have passed over that furrowed brow, and bleached those locks of fair hair that appear under her close cap; but her eyes are not dim, nor her force much abated, though twenty of those fifty years have been years of weeping, distress, and shame. The houses were favoured long ago to which Jean Rhymer went as a servant; and no one can tell what her share was in the strange and sole transgression which banished her husband, and has overclouded all the excellence of her life. But so it is; and no one less than Jean herself thinks that this shadow ever can or ever should pass away till life itself has found its consummation and renewal in the Judgment and the grave.

To look at this apartment now, it looks any thing but uncheerful; the sun shining in upon the bright colours of the "calygo" which lies on the deal table by the window, and on Jean's own lap as she labours at it, fashioning the narrow sleeve and shortened bodice. But if you look long, you will see how the solitary woman puts up her hand softly now and then to wipe a tear from her cheek; and how dull and full of apathy is the look with which sometimes she turns to her dim window or casts her eye towards the open door. The air is very sweet without with human voices, the fairy tongues of children, full of laughter and pleasantness, and all the kindly hum of neighbourhood and near familiar life. Footsteps come and go on the narrow path, passengers on the way throw a momentary shadow over the window; but no one turns aside to enter here, and you can see that not a step amongst them all brings expectation to

this gray and wrinkled face. Other modes of occupation besides this one are visible in the little room,—a small basket, with a half-completed stocking; a spinning-wheel, with a great heap of hemp upon it, ready for the evening times, when Jean cannot see, or the hours of undesired leisure when she has no other work in hand;—but there is not a single trace of human intercourse or companionship in all this lonely house. And it is strange to Jean, after the wintry night has fallen, and she has closed her door upon the darkening chill, to hear a light knock claim admittance, and a little step pause at the threshold.

"There's little care in this step," said Jean to herself as she rose to open the door. "I dinna ken what can bring the like of this light foot to me. Annie Horsburgh, is it you?"

The visitor paused a moment at the door, where Jean herself still stood fronting her, without much appearance of hospitality.

"Am I no to come in?" said Annie, in her sweet girlish voice.

"Come in, and kindly welcome, if it's your will," said the mistress of the house; "but I'm little used to see a strange face stopping at my door. It's a dark wild night to be out your lane. Come in to the fire, and tell me your errand. See, sit down; there's nae draught here."

"But I've nae errand, Jean," said Annie, with many secret blushes. "Folk never look to be asked what errand they have when they ca' at a neighbour's door."

"I havena been neighbours with the like of you for mony a lang day," said Jean with a sigh; "but I'm very weel content ye should come for kindness, if you've nae objection yoursel'; for I'll no deny I am gey dowie mony a day since my Eben gaed to the sea."

"It was summer when he sailed," said Annie. "How lang has the *Traveller* been at sea now?" And as Annie spoke she turned away her eyes, and laid her hand unconsciously upon the idle wheel; for Annie Horsburgh remembered with a faithful memory, not only the day, but the very hour and moment, when the *Traveller* sailed, and did not chuse, as she asked the question, to meet with her guilty look the mother's eye.

"Seven months and twa days," said Jean. "I count every hour, whiles to mourn over them, so dark and lonesome as they are to me, and whiles to be glad that every one that passes brings my laddie nearer hame."

"Are you aye your lane? Is there no a thing to divert you, Jean?" said the visitor sympathetically.

"Na; you're no to think I'm repining," said this humble woman, suddenly assuming an easier tone. "I'm real weel off; naeboddy ever meddles with me. At kirk or market I never get an ill word, and mony a good turn that I've nae claim to, from ae year's end to the ither; and Eben's in a grand boat, and nae fear of pressing him, and the best son that ever was. Ay, Annie, you're innocent,—you dinna ken; but ane needs to have lang experience and trouble like me to ken what mercies the Lord puts in the cup till it rins ower, and a' to an unworthy creature that deserves to have her name blotted out and forgotten haith in earth and heaven."

Jean Rhymer put up her hand to her eyes; not any outburst of emotion, but the quiet habitual tears that came to her without immediate cause were those that she wiped away.

"But a'boddy likes you, Jean," said Annie, who was crying for sympathy.

"Blessings on them a' for charity!" answered Jean; and she continued with a steady voice, "I've plenty to divert me too; there's my work,—I'm aye blithe when my hands are full,—and there's the bairns playing about the doors; and there's my ain folk whiles come east to see me now, no to speak of a' my pleasure thinking of my Eben. I've seen mony lads, but I never saw his marrow, though he is my ain. Bless you, Annie, you dinna ken how easy auld folk and lanely folk divert themselves—if it was naething but the steps gaun by the door."

"I mind when I've been blithe to hear a step upon the stanes," said Annie, blushing and turning away once more; "but that was because I kent whase step it was, and where it was bound."

"I would ken my Eben's foot as far off as ears could hear, if a' the town were tramping on the road and him but ane among the lave," said Jean. "But mony a day, when I'm sitting quiet, hearing step by step, I think the folk out of their kenning let me see their hearts. There's Sandy Anderson gaun quick by in his sea-boots, with his heavy tread; and I ken as weel as if he came in to tell me that the nets are in the boats, and them a' ready for sea; and I ken when Alick Wast gangs light upon the path that he's courtin' Lizzie Todd, and kens she's waiting, and wouldna have a' the world to hear; and there, Annie Horsburgh, hearken yoursel',—do you no hear what heavy steps, ilka ane like a sob?"

And so they were,—a slow, heavy, listless foot; in the silence of the night you could hear it go so far upon its weary way.

"It's Christian Linton; her eye's dull in her face, and her heart in her breast. She's nae mair spirit for fighting, or striving, or a single thing in this life; and yet for a' she canna rest, but gangs about the doors with that waeft tread, as if ilka foot was clodded and never could be free mair. I'm aye wae when I hear her pass the road; she never gets the clod off her foot, and I ken by that she's nae heart for any thing, and canna pit forth her hands for another wrestle to save hersel'. And there was just your ainsel', Annie,—I kent before you stoppit at this door that it was a young heart free of trouble that came over the way."

"But I'm no free of trouble, Jean," said Annie with a sigh, and a look of some offence; for this seemed a most uninteresting and commonplace position to the apprehension of Annie.

A grave smile came upon Jean Rhymer's face. "You're just a bairn yet, bonnie and made muckle o', every ane contending whilk can like you best. You're neither heavy-footed nor heavy-hearted, Annie; and there's mair bright days before you than a' that's behind. You maunna meet trouble, it's aye soon enough when it comes; and weel I wot, if it lay in my wish, you would never ken mair than ye ken now, and that would be a good lot."

But Annie was not to be convinced. By and by, when she left Jean Rhymer's door, she went slowly, in heaviness and thought, remembering hersel' of that youthful trouble which was her best possession almost,—such dreams and pleasant fancies, such hopes and smiles, as it brought in its train; but very soon the slow pace quickened, the drooping eyelid rose, and one could not hear the ringing music of this light young footstep without thought of a light heart.

When her visitor went away, Jean Rhymer closed her door with care, and put the shutter on her window. What treasure had Jean within that caused such precaution in this trustful place? Hush! there is a brightening on her face like an invisible smile. Is Jean Rhymer a miser, then, humble and patient though she be? for this which her eye delights to count and dwell upon is nothing better than a little hoard of money,—twelve soiled one-pound notes,—laid up in a careful parcel in an old pocket-book at the head of her bed. She has added other two, as she counts them once again, and lays them by. Jean Rhymer all her life has laboured hard for daily bread. What means this secret treasure now?

CHAPTER III.

"What makes ye sae quiet this morning, Annie?—a' the town's astir with the news, but there's naething but sighing in your face. What ails ye the day?"

"Naething ails me. I'm just gann about my ain business," said Annie somewhat ungraciously.

"I wouldna gie an auld friend such an answer if I was you," retorted Katrine Mailin, or Melville, a very young newly-married wife, something disposed to stand on her dignity; "and it doesna become a young lass to have such a gloom on her brow. I'm sure I would aye have been glad to hear such a grand story of a neebor-lad mysel', whasver jo he was; and Eben was aye finding errands to come this road, and hanging about your father's door when he was at hame."

"Eben!—he's been away this three year. Wha kens where he is, or what he is now?" said Annie, with a heightened colour, resuming her knitting so rapidly that her quick-sighted companion divined at once how deep an interest she had roused by the name.

Annie, seated in her mother's garden, was knitting in the sun, and very prettily the sun shone upon her morning undress,—tho pretty, pink, short gown and striped petticoat,—which did her slender youthful figure much more justice than the orthodox gown in which alone Annie could make her appearance, either in her mother's better room or in the street. But Annie had been up by break of day about some household business, and though the sun is strong in the heavens it still wants more than an hour of noon; and she has taken her stocking in a fit of natural caprice, and with her sleeves folded back, and the warm summer breeze playing in at her loose collar and over her round white arms, had fallen into a fit of meditation, when the voice of Katrine, over the wall of the adjoining garden, startled her out of her thoughtful repose. Katrine is a saucy beauty of a gayer and wilder order than her friend, and, brave in a muslin gown, her train looped through her pocket-hole, and her thin white apron fluttering in the pleasant wind, Katrine, idly seated on the boundary-wall, forgets—which it is easy to do at any time—that the whole responsibility of this little house behind her, and all its domestic economics, lie upon her shoulders, and only remembers, what she always does remember, that—mistress of this same house, of John, the joint proprietor, and of hersel'—she, Katrine, has reached an eminence immeasurably above the level of Annie Horsburgh, her girlish friend.

"Weel, I'm sure ye might say ye were glad to hear the news,—a decent lad that liked you weel, if looks are ever true,—and the hail town astir; no another thing in ony body's head from Cellardyke to the kirk-latch."

"I canna be glad at what I diinna ken," said Annie. Tho wily Katrine saw the flush on her cheek, the quickened breathing, and the trembling hands, which dropped loop after loop, in vain haste and anxiety, from the glittering wires. The opportunity was too tempting; the young wife could not resist it.

"Ye needna tell me," said Katrine solemnly; "I'm sure there's something ails ye the day. Give me that stocking, Annie; there's twenty loops drappit, if there's ane. Maybe it's the sun; a bright sun's a confusing thing. If I was you, I would lio down an hour in my bed. I'll speak to your mother mysel', and tell her you're no weel, if you're feared."

"I'm weel enough," said Annie impatiently, "if ye would just let folk be. You're aye hawering, you married wives. I wish ye would just mind, Katrine, wha's the auldest and wha's the youngest; and I ken a'body said which was the lightest head of the twa before you came to a house of your ain."

"I'm sure I aye mind, Annie," said Katrine, with meek exultation. "I ken I'm the youngest; but a single lass is aye under her mother, and I'm my ain mistress. I should like to see either man or wife that could master me: our John's a decent lad,—he kens better than to try. But, Annie woman, you've never said what you thought of the news."

Annie had reached a considerable height of irritation by this time; but on this renewed attack she made a pause to collect herself.

"You've never tell'd me what the news is, Katrine,"

said Annie, with some agitation; "it's no my blame if I dinna ken."

"Ye'll no let on, ye ken—eh, Annie? I wouldna be double-minded if I was you. I wonder what the grand Misses Leslie, east the town, would say to see you in your short gown. Naeboddy but the auld wives wear them now; but you're never like ither folk, Annie Horsburgh—What is't for?"

"It's because ither folk havers, and I'm no gaun to follow a crowd," said Annie sharply.

"Eh me, if she's no flyting! But you've plenty gowns, and your folk have plenty siller to buy ye mair. I wouldna be seen such a like sight, Annie, if I was you. Weel, the fashion's aye changing,—and speaking of changes, I'm sure to think of Eben! but I are likit that laddie mysel'."

Annie said nothing. By dint of great perseverance and determination the refractory loops had again been recovered into the regular rank and file, and the click of the indignant wires rang through the sunny air, and through the momentary stillness. The exasperated Annie was not to be tempted into another question; and her tormentor, for her own satisfaction, proceeded with the story which could no longer be withheld.

"Ye maybe dinna ken what a transport is; but ye mind, Annie, the *Traveller's* anc. It carries nae cargo but sodgers; but whether they're packed in the hold like common gear, or if they're standing stiff with their guns and their bagnets on the deck, I canna tell,—but they'll be awfu' in the men's road if they are. Weel, I canna tell where it was they were lying, but it was some gate in-shore; and there was to be a grand dancing, and a' the sodger-officers and the captain and the first mate were landed to the ploy. The ship was weel out from the shore,—maybe that she mightna be off her course, maybe because the coast wasna canny, I didna hear; but the folk werena to come aboard till the morning, and the second mate had the command his lane. Weel, wha should come nigh, in the mid-watch of the night, but a fast schooner, with raking masts and a' her canvas set, and the grandest sailor that ever was. She came right on upon the *Traveller*, no a better wish in her head but to run our boat down. Weel, you'll no make this lad that was second mate blind his e'en, seeing that they were very guid ains, as I can witness, and as black as slaes; so he cut his cable, and out with his long gun, and gae her a shot into her bows. Ye may think the men were wild by this time, seeing what the thieving villain meant, and they up till her,—they're a' Fife lads, down to wee Tammie Coustie, the captain's man; and when the folk ashore came fleeing to the beach, hearing the cries and the guns,—Hey for Anster and Elie, and a' the bonny towns of Fife!—what did they see but the thief of a Frenchman towing at the *Traveller's* stern, and our flag flying at the mast, and her ain fause villains of a crew a' safe under the hatches, no a cutlass or a pistol among them. I'm no surprised the town's daft at the news; I could cry 'Hurra!' my very sel'."

And Katrine, really moved, broke off abruptly to clap her hands and laugh and cry with triumphant excitement. Meanwhile poor Annie Horsburgh, bending her head down upon her hands, and trembling so that her very chair rocked under her, was fain to weep as quietly as possible, guessing, but not daring to ask, who was the chief hero of this scene.

"You would never guess wha he was, the second mate. Just Eben, and nae ither, that was at the school wi' us a'; and the minister says his name's in the papers,—Eben Rhymer; and he's cleared it, and made it a name we can a' be proud of, for an Anster man and a neebour-lad. Eh, Annie Horsburgh, there's twelve chappit, and me never thought of my man's dinner! but it's a' your blame."

So saying, Katrine fled abruptly to find her fire out, and barely time for the important processes of the principal meal, leaving Annie in a strango flutter of emotion, quite indifferent as to who might see her in her short gown at twelve o'clock in the day.

OUR NATIONAL LIBRARY.

LONDON at last possesses a public building of which she may be justly proud, one that will fairly bear comparison with any foreign building of the same description: the new reading-room at the British Museum is worthy the great nation to which it belongs. Enter with us, reader, the hall of the British Museum, and we will give you a peep at that inner *sanctum* which lies far in beyond the long bright passage directly opposite us as we come into the building. We have procured "a reader's ticket," no very difficult matter; a note to Mr. Panizzi, the head librarian, from any professional person will be promptly and kindly answered. But our "faces are known;" therefore we push without interruption through two double swinging-doors, pass along the corridor over thick pile-matting (on which our feet fall noislessly) to two other pairs of plate-glass doors, surmounted by the bust of Mr. Panizzi, the magician of the place. These close behind us without a sound, shutting out effectually the busy world, and leave us standing at the shrines of Literature and Silence, whose votaries are seen on every side calmly pursuing their mysterious rites.

On entering it, we are struck with the light cheerful aspect of the noble building, and the delicate and chaste colouring of its dome; yet there is a sufficient degree of decorous quiet to distinguish it as a place of study, and the voice instinctively sinks a tone or two lower than ordinary to suit the gravity of the place. It is said that some of the *habitués* still regret the old reading-room;—the old reading-room! already a thing of the past, with its mews-like approach, its cellar-like entrance, and its heavy and essentially soporific atmosphere. They miss too the familiar creak of the iron grating that ran down the centre of the room, and rattled beneath the unwary reader's foot, and the cosy book-counter, with its view of the noble library beyond. It certainly requires more hardihood to linger about the present counter, situated as it is in the centre of the room, and forming a sort of focus to all the thirty-five tables; but there are many compensations even for this loss in the greater degree of privacy and comfort, ay, and even luxury, to be obtained in the new room. There was at one time a demur whether colour could be appropriately introduced into a place entirely devoted to the purposes of study. Colour gained the day; a decision at which all those must rejoice who, remembering the relief experienced by the eye in the old room from the morsel of colour produced by a lady-reader's bonnet or the bright garb of a novel, can now rest their eyes, dazzled with black type, on as exquisite and soothing a combination of colour as the most fastidious can desire.

Simplicity of arrangement and vastness of design are the features of the place. Without a pillar or sunken column, or any semblance of support, the walls sweep gracefully upwards from a triple tier of bound books, till they unite above our heads, at a height of one hundred and six feet, in a sky-like dome of blue, white, and gold.

The circle of the arca we may, for the sake of illustration, compare to a wheel, in circumference between four and five hundred feet. The centre point, the axle, is occupied by the superintendent of the room, Mr. Watts, a gentleman of courtesy and information, and a staff of assistants. In recesses round the axle are the various catalogues, tomes of about two feet by one and a half in size; of these a word hereafter.

From the free passage round the catalogue-recesses radiate the reading-benches, the spokes of our wheel. They are well worth our attentive examination, as their construction is a marvellous adaptation of means to ends, much of which is not obvious at a glance, nor, indeed, without special information. We must compare them to very long and very wide tables, covered with smooth black leather, divided down their whole length by a partition, hollow in the centre, rounded over at the top by a brass wirework, and sufficiently high to separate opposite readers. By means of this sepa-

which they live by necessary order. This force of society, so inestimable, and without which law cannot but be harsh and unjust, has always found its vent in the casual influence of humane and Christian minds; but we regard the Birmingham movement as the first attempt to convert it from an accident into a system, and to embody it in a distinct organisation. Henceforth we will hope the time draws near when no man can be convicted of transgression who has not previously learned the duty which he has violated; when no culprit not yet hardened shall be dismissed to penalties that feed the guilt which may have had its root in accident; and when a repentant man may not find the path of vice an easy declivity, while that of virtue leads to arduous heights, where the sword of vengeance always glitters, and the hand of mercy is never stretched out.

Of the five departments which the Birmingham Association has established, we may regard as the most important those of "Education," and "Punishment and Reformation."

As to the former of these sections, to which we must at present limit ourselves, it is earnestly to be hoped that the Birmingham Society will recognise in the discovery of worthy educators the one basis of all success in education. The personal fitness of the living agent for his task is a matter of far more weight than the amount of knowledge he may have acquired. A man may have much to communicate and yet absolutely want the faculty of communication. And even granting his ability to impart knowledge in a lucid and methodical manner, his great value as a moral instrument will depend upon his power to begin his work at the beginning. Mere instruction, indeed,—that knowledge which is furnished from without,—may supply the pupil with weapons for the battle of life; but the mode in which these weapons will be applied, whether to the good or harm of the individual and society, must turn upon the dispositions which are developed from within. It is not only possible, but a matter of frequent occurrence, to render man by the mere training of the intellect a more expert malefactor. The true educator will begin with the conscience as the very root of human life; he will discern in the conscience that primary element of being which connects humanity with its Source, which at once quickens and purifies the sympathies, stimulates and enlightens the intellect, and makes acquired knowledge, not only precious as a means of worldly success, but sacred as a trust. For this culture of the whole being, much more is required than stores of information or skill in unfolding them; there must be a deep sense of responsibility, a generous sympathy, a patient and plastic energy that makes light of toil and hardship, while evolving from the seeds of character the consummate perfection of the Christian citizen. The true educator, we repeat, is the one condition of true education. It might seem folly to insist upon a truth so trite, were it not also a truth so disregarded. How often amongst the professors of routine instruction, armed with a catechism, a multiplication-table, and a cane, shall we find that living response of one human heart to the needs of another, without which education, in its best sense, is impossible, and instruction becomes the mere mechanical contact of barren dogmas with coerced memories? Let us not be supposed to intend any censure upon the mass of educators because they fail to realise the ideal we demand. Urgent, however, is the need that such an ideal should be attained, that a higher value should be assigned to the position of the educator, and that he whose office it is to train humanity should himself be one of its noblest illustrations.

HORSE-SHOEING.

By GERICAULT.

GERICAULT was a French painter of the highest talent and promise, a single one of whose works immediately and alone sufficed to raise him into a more than European reputation. This was named "The Raft of the Medusa," and was so original a subject, and so powerfully dealt with, that the

world received the picture with acclamation, hailing the painter as a new-born son of Apollo, who was to outshine all his contemporaries, and dazzle mankind with a new revelation in art. All this glory seemed to be his; but Death took him in early manhood, and left but a name, which, considering the small number of his works, is stamped strangely deep into the history of art in France.

Although much of his reputation rested upon the great marine piece referred to, Gericault was, however, equally, if not more, fond of painting horses; of this taste the picture before us is an example. It will be interesting, not alone as the work of a great French artist, the circumstances of whose life had much that attracts the imagination about it, nor on account of its own individual merits as a work of art, but as affording some means of comparing the peculiar national characters of French and English painters in treating similar subjects; for the well-known picture by Landseer, on the same subject, will occur to every one as a fitting companion to this. We shall not pursue the parallel, but leave it to the discrimination of the reader, confident that he will find much matter for observation and thought by placing the works side by side.

The stalwart French shoe-smith is fitting a new shoe to the heel of one of those heavy Norman farm-horses, which seem like elephants of horse-flesh. The method of doing this is quite different from that of English farriers, one of whom would take the hoof on to his knee. The horse also is secured into a sort of frame, instead of being merely tied up by the head to the wall, as is the custom with us. The owner of the horse leans against the frame; the little boy caresses the immense brute; while in the background the smith's assistant urges the smithy fire to a glow. There is so much action and spirit in the whole of this design, as to indicate it to be the work of no ordinary mind, but of one who, preconceiving a thought, went through it with force and will.

L. L.

EBEN.—A TRUE STORY.

By MRS. OLIPHANT.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE is no change in Jean Rhymer's solitary cottage; as humble as ever, sending up its little curl of smoke into the summer skies, still a little apart from its neighbours, as if with voluntary humility, and something like the lowly willing life-long penance which its patient mistress exhibits in her life,—this little house lies low under the sunshine, brightening with its one window and its open door under the cheerful light. Three years older, but unchanged, the humble owner of the house sits in her habitual seat between the fireplace and the window, with her work upon her knee. She is "neat-handed," as they say in Anster. Sombre as her own appearance is, many a little tasteful commendation in the toilette of these rural beauties tell of Jean Rhymer's hand, and she has constant occupation among them; though still the unspun hemp upon the wheel and the uncompleted stocking in the basket show that Jean is not disposed to lose an hour of her time, even when her eyes fail, and her sewing glimmers before them in the candle-light.

But the little, desolate, well-ordered apartment is strangely filled to-day; not a solitary customer, abounding with painful and minute directions, and full of anxiety that the new gown—which is an event in her life—should look as well as possible, but a little crowd of maidens and matrons, not the least considerable in Anster, fill its narrow bounds with a buzz and stir which make Jean something nervous. The work lies on her lap untouched. She would rise to show her respect but that her limbs feel feeble, and there is such a fluttering tremor upon all her frame; and there are not half as many chairs and stools in the house as would seat her crowd of guests. If you look at Jean more narrowly, you will see that the tears that fill her eyes are not tears of

grief, and that a strange brightness has come to every line of her gray and withered face.

"I diinna doubt you're surprised," said Jean meekly; "but no me; for I kent what was in him lang ago."

"You might ken he was a good son, and a well-dispositioned lad,—we a' kent that, mair or less," said the soft-hearted large Mrs. Horsburgh, who led the invading party; "but there's mony a good lad could nae mair have done the like of this than I could lift the Isle of May off the sea. Na, woman, you needna tell me; I ken you were out of your wits as weel as a' the rest."

"I wasna surprised," repeated Jean; and if it was pride, it was a pride so humble, and so full of the touching confidence of love, that not one of her auditors could doubt or belie her. "I wouldna wonder at ony thing my Eben did, except it was something ill; for I ken him from a bairn what's in his heart."

There was a little pause; for, full of curiosity and excitement as this worshipful assembly was, no one could immediately interrupt the deeper current of the mother's thoughts. At last Mrs. Horsburgh, privileged by right of her universal friendliness, broke in:

"I wish ye would tell us some mair; we're a' wild to hear about Eben,—what he's thinking himsel', and how he's to be advanced, and if he's proud of his prize. I'm sure he's mair than mortal if he's no proud, when a' Anster, east and west, is proud for him. What does he say in his letter, Jean? No a creature has a word to say, but a' about Eben. Tell us, like a woman, what the laddie thinks himsel'."

"He says, there came on an awfu' gale when they gaed to sea the next day," said Jean, holding jealously in her hand a letter which she did not open, "and they couldna save baith ships; so they had muckle wark getting the prisoners aboard the *Traveller*, and syne the French boat gaed down."

"Gaed down!" there was a universal cry. "Eh, woman, I thought to see Eben come into Anster harbour captain of her, like wee Ritchie Allan, in St. Minan's, with the French prize," cried one gossip.

"A' the poor laddie's toil's gaen for nought," exclaimed another; "he'll get nae prize-money now."

"Never you mind, Jean," cried big Mrs. Horsburgh; "he's gotten a guid name and favour with the great; there's nae fears for the siller."

"The captain of the Frenchman wouldna leave his ship,—the gunnel was in the water, but he was a brave chield, and wouldna stir,—so my Eben grippit him head and shoulters, and cast him into the boat: he's a strong callant, and come the length of a man now. If they could press him, I see warrant they wadna be lang; but he's safe in a transport-ship, and though he was offered a sma' officer's commission in a man-o'-war, my Eben says, na. He aye minds upon his auld mother at hame. The war's hot and sair the now, he canna tell when he may win back; but he says he'll ne'er be content till he's sailing quiet voyages out of Anster, and has his ain house to look to, and a' his auld friends,—that's what my Eben says."

"But I would take the commission, if I was him," said Katrine Mailin, "and come hame in navy-blue, with a gold band on my bannet. I wouldna like to see the lass in Anster then that would say him nay; no a right woman in the town would ever speak to her again."

"Whisht, Katrine; Eben's far wiser," said Mrs. Horsburgh. "If he had just a good sloop now, and siller for a plenishing—"

But the words were said under her breath, and the sentence was not concluded; it caught nobody's ear but the one to which it was most important; Jean Rhymer listened with a glistening eye.

"But Annie's never come," said Jean to herself softly, when her visitors were gone. "Annie, that aye came to let me hear the news, she's no lookit near me since the word came,—I canna say she's just like my Eben, but she's a good lassie, and he likes her weel;—I wonder what's keeping Annie,—and after a' her mother said."

Jean did not need to wonder long; for that same evening, when the feeble candle-light shone dim through the thick panes, and Jean sat before her little fire,—it was a balmy June night, but the fire never came amiss in these humble habitations,—knitting her stockings, a light foot approaching warned her to expect her youthful visitor. But Jean was somewhat disappointed to find that Annie's face did not express the same frank and open pleasure, the same quick inquisitive interest, which all her neighbours had already shown. Instead of this, Annie's averted eyes sought any thing rather than to meet Jean's astonished glance; and Annie's conversation lingered upon a hundred little trifling subjects before it came near the one which engrossed all her companion's thoughts.

"I've restless hands," said Annie, twisting about her apron in her fingers till their nervous motion attracted Jean's attention; "I'm aye used to work at something; I'll take the wheel."

And Annie took the wheel; and with her head turned aside made the little machine hum and twirl under the action of her busy foot and hand. Jean did not understand the long silence into which her young visitor's manner fascinated even herself; but at last the one subject, which swallowed up all others, took full possession of her mind again, and the mother spoke:

"I havena seen ye, Annie, since the word came about Eben."

"No." Such a strange, blank, trembling answer! and Annie's head turns still farther away from Jean's eye, and from the light.

"O, Annie, lassie! I thought naebody would understand me, a' my joy and a' my thankfulness, like you; but you havena a kind thought for Eben, poor man, poor man! and I thought you would think o't near as muckle as mysel'."

"So I do, so I do!" said a whisper by Jean's side, and Annie's tears dropped one by one upon the hemp she spun. Jean Rhymer dried her own eyes, half-compassionate, half-indignant, and shook her head.

"I canna tell what to think, nor what you mean," said Eben's mother. "Maybe you wonder, like a' the rest, that the like of him could do such grand things. Naebody but his mother kent what was in him; I'm no surprised—no me!"

The murmuring broken words of Annie's reply were lost in the little stir of resentment with which Jean's disappointed hope expressed itself.

"What did you say, Annie?" said the mother anxiously, when she became aware that her young companion had spoken. But Annie was not able to repeat it, and Jean lost the comfort of the words; though she was not left in much doubt, after all, when Annie rose from the wheel with her shy and tear-stained face, and still scarcely venturing to look at her, said, "Good night," and hurried away.

"A sloop, and siller for a plenishing." When the window was closed and the door barred, Jean took out her "posy" from the head of her bed, and turned over the now considerable bundle of soiled notes once more. Increase and blessing to such miser-hoards! An angel could scarcely have dropped a purer or more generous tear than the drop of mingled sadness and joy which fell upon Jean's humble treasure as she put it carefully away.

CHAPTER V.

But one year followed and then another. The town of Anster grew oblivious of the great exploit of Eben; his mother's little cottage was no longer crowded with inquirers. When Eben was mentioned, indeed, a kind word of hearty commendation followed his name; but by degrees it came about that Eben was seldom mentioned. Jean Rhymer's harmless life went on as of old. Toiling day by day, she ate her bread with thankfulness of heart; her neighbours even forgot to wonder why, with her regular share of Eben's monthly pay, two entire pounds,—a glorious provision for a single woman,—she should need to toil so long and painfully;

but her services were in request, and it was the usage of these thrifty people to employ themselves in all available modes of industry; so Jean's labour passed with very little comment, and no one knew of the slow accumulation, gradual and bulky, in the old pocket-book,—the hoard which Jean took down when her heart failed her, to comfort her eyes withal.

And many a suitor went away discomfited from the cheerful kitchen, sacred to winter-evening wooings, where Annie Horsburgh's something pale and pensive beauty gave an additional charm to her father's wealth. Good Mrs. Horsburgh, big and soft-hearted, did not quite approve of this. Eben might be very well indeed, if he were here to keep up by constant care and devotion his own interest in Annie's thoughts; but Annie bado fair to be very soon in a position which an Anster beauty could ill tolerate—without a "lad." There was something humiliating in the thought.

"I'm no sae caring if she wants to wait, and keep free till he comes hame," said Mrs. Horsburgh, with perplexity, "I'm no pressing for her to be marriet; though I had been in my ain house five year mysel' afore I was as auld,—she's four-and-twenty, that I should say sae, and her my only bairn;—but to scorn every decent lad away from her, ne'er to have ane at her hand to gie her right respect, like a' tho rest,—it's this that troubles me."

But it seems that Annie was undutifully indifferent to her mother's trouble. She was generally in very good spirits herself,—not at all pining or discontented,—and suffered with great good-humour many a sally from the loud and merry Katrine, her next-door neighbour, who now, overwhelmed and deluged with children, was a little less idle, but not a whit less provoking, than of old. Things were in this position, and Eben had been full six years away, when, on a winter's night, at his own fireside, John Horsburgh, a worthy bailie of the borough, took upon himself to expound to a little company his sentiments as to the marriage of daughters in general, and in particular the settlement of his own.

The party consisted, first, of Mrs. Horsburgh, seated, large and full, in a great elbow-chair covered with check linen. Mrs. Horsburgh's soft hands, dinted with many a dimple, were crossed, in loving large commixture of thumbs and fingers, in her lap; her feet were on a wooden stool; and a little curly-headed boy, a neighbour's child, hung by her warm skirts, roasting his sunburnt head under the glow of the fire. In the opposite arm-chair the redoubtable John reposed himself after his daily labours, his irascible face twinkling with the lights of a mood of more than ordinary content. Pretty Annie Horsburgh, looking very young on her dreadful eminence of four-and-twenty years, sat a little apart knitting the stocking, which her well-accustomed hand went about busily with little guidance from the eye. Not far from Annie, a handsome young sailor lingered in the background, the only suitor at present on duty; while Katrine, loud and joyous, poising an unruly year-old baby on her shoulder, stands at the door, where she has stood for a long half-hour, protesting breathlessly now and then, that "she only came in for half a minute, and durstna stay, or a' the bairns and John would be running wild."

No one observes that the audience has been increased by some one humbly asking admittance at the half-opened door; so the applicant stands timidly on the threshold, waiting till John Horsburgh has delivered his speech that her voice may be heard.

"Daughters are little profit in general," says the oracle of the Anster council-chamber; "for my part, I think it's naething but a disgraco to puir folk to burden the world with a wheen lassies, when stout callants might help themselves; but I wouldna discountenance them a'thegither. I'm a tolerant man; I like fair play. Ae man may have wheat-bread at his table when anither has but barley-scones; and I've seen where daughters were a very decent plenishing to a guid house with plenty of siller. They're aye a fash. I've read books were naething frae beginning to end but how sair decent folk had to toil to get them off their hands; and I'm sure I've been bothered mysel' with as mony haverels

seeking after my bit lassie as if she was something out of the common. But I have my ain rule. 'Can ye buy my house at the West Brae,' says I. 'Can ye put plenishing in't that'll please the mistress? For if ye can, I've nae objection, ye can speak to Annie; but if ye canna, ye may be a very decent lad, but you're no for me.' Ye may laugh, but I'm earnest; where ane came that could, he never got a civil word from that gipsy thero; and my guid house at the West Brae, that I built for this ungrateful monkey, is bleaching in the rain, with never a fire kindled under its roof. Ye're a wise woman, Katrine; they're a' callants, thae imps of darkness. Be thankful, though they are evil spirits, that there's no ae lassie among them a'."

"If I was you, John Horsburgh, I would be civil," cried Katrine, tossing her wild plaything in the air; "but wee Patie's no hoeing, and my man would gie twalpennies he had a sister like himsel' the morn."

A timid knock, repeated two or three times, was audible at last, and Jean Rhymer's pale face looked in at the door.

"I came to say there's twa of the bairns ill in Ralph Horsburgh's at the East Shore," said Jean; "and the mistress would be thankful if somebody would help her; for she's no very weel hersel'. I said I would leave the message, for I was to pass this gate. Good night."

Before any one could answer, Jean had disappeared into the darkness, and you could not perceive in this black unlighted road with what a light and steady step Jean Rhymer went upon her way. Her lips were moving, muttered words sometimes fell from her tongue; she was making a very laborious calculation, and wondering over the unknown magnitude of the house at the West Brae, and the kind of plenishing that would please the mistress.

"She's kind by nature, and has a soft heart," said Jean to herself; "she wouldna be for ower grand an outset. My Eben, my bonnie lad, if I but saw him hame!"

But what is this light in Jean Rhymer's window? It cannot come from the fire she gathered so carefully when she went away,—a clear ruddy glow, it comes merrily through these thick panes, kindling the very darkness of the road into light and exultation. With a trembling heart, and a step faltering with haste and anxiety, accusing herself bitterly for her own incaution in leaving the key of the house and of all her treasure even in her trusty neighbour's hands, and already in fancy beholding a troop of strange depredators violently spoiling her store, Jean hurried forward to investigate. True there is some one within,—some one looking about with careful scrutiny over the well-remembered walls, the homely furniture, the work upon the table. The fire blazes up a cordial welcome to the stranger; the little candle on the table glows like a star through the night. Take time before you scream and rouse the neighbourhood; see who this housebreaker is.

He is standing before the fire, taking down one by one and replacing again on the mantelpiece some rude child's toys, which you would think he has some memory of, he handles them so tenderly; and the firelight glows upon his bronzed and manly face, and on the bold, frank, open mien of one who fears no disrespect and knows no shame. But he does not see the blanched face at the window, the strain of anxious gazing, the lessening terror, the growing hope. Quick to the door, Jean Rhymer,—quick, lest your footing fail you and your strength give way before his arm is at hand to hold his mother up. With a great cry she rushes blindly at the door; and now it is closed upon her, and no oyo sees the meeting. Eben has come home.

CHAPTER VI.

"Annie Horsburgh's never married yet." The words are said half carelessly; but a less acute oyo than his mother's might see how Eben turns his head away, and does not chose to betray to this broad daylight the glow upon his face.

"Na, she's no married." Jean is very cautious, and with her wary oyo follows every motion of the young man's face.

"And aye as bonnie as ever," said Eben hastily, but with a sigh. "The folk say I'll see changes, mother; but I've seen two that make me think I havena been a twelvemonth away."

"What twa is't, Eben?"

"There's you for one," said her son slowly; "and—well, it's no good trying, I canna get Annie Horsburgh out of my head,—she's just the same sweet face she had the day the *Traveller* sailed—But I'm no come home to speak of havcrs. Mother, what's a' this gear?"

The question is easier asked than answered; and just then a little messenger comes to the door to see if the hasp of bemp is ready for John Gilfillan, the merchant. With a slight tremor Jean rises to commit the completed work into the child's hands, and returns very like a culprit to hear the question asked again in a more imperative tone.

"What's a' this gear, mother; and what's John Gilfillan to you?"

For, alas, in her joy last night, and in her still more overpowering certainty of joy this morning, Jean has forgotten to put aside a half-finished gown, and to push her wheel out of the way; a convicted criminal she stands before her son, her humble eyes cast down, and her hand shaking a little. This has a wonderful effect on Eben. He springs to her side, thrusts her into a chair, exclaims at himself with remorseful anger:

"I've startled ye, mother; but what way did ye no say there was ower little siller? Mother, will ye no speak to me?"

"There wasna ower little siller, Eben, my man."

Her voice was trembling and uncertain; but a sort of joyous embarrassment mingled with its deprecation which grievously perplexed Eben.

"You did it just for pleasure, then," said her son, unable to restrain a kick of indignation which sent poor Jean's work-basket skipping over the floor.

Jean rose hastily, but not to pick up this same basket, as Eben—partly angry at himself, partly at her—supposed. He thought his mother was crazy as she mounted on a chair to reach the head of her wooden bed. With breathless hurried eagerness she returned, holding in her hand a bulky parcel; the young man looked on in wonder, while forth upon the table before him a perfect cloud of one-pound notes descended through the darkened air: like autumn leaves in handfuls they flittered down upon the deal table. He looked on stupefied.

"Mother, what does it mean?"

"It's a' your ain, Eben! I've looked at it mostly every night since there was only twa of them, and it's a' your ain, my darling bairn! Ye're evens with Annie Horsburgh; ye can buy the house at the West Brae whenever ye will; and Eben, Eben, my man, it's a' your ain!"

And down they poured upon the homely board, unused to bear a more valuable burden than Jean Rhymer's simple meal; every shade of complexion, every gradation of purity, from the rare new bit of spotless paper to this one black as night, whereon you can trace but faintly the mystic repetitions that make money of the worthless shred. In a strange flush of excitement, Jean showered them down one by one. Her son could not speak; he gazed at them for a time with blank amazement and incredulity, and at last, burying his face in his hands, bent down upon the table among its precious encumbrances, and wept aloud.

"Ye maunna greet, Eben; ye're no to say a word. Eh, man, but I was glad laying up treasure for my bairn, me that helped to bring shame upon him from his earliest breath. I've been real weel a' the time, I've never wanted night nor day; kindness and blessing the Lord poured out on me, till my heart was grit and my eup run ower, and now my son's back, and it's permitted to the like of me to help him to a bein house of his ain. O, Eben, I'm unworthy of the grace! You're not to greet, but to rejoice; for I ken the Lord's accepted of a broken spirit now. Your no ill-pleased at me? I'm your mother, Eben, my man!"

"My mother, my mother!" The strong young man

threw himself at her feet, hid his face in her homely gown, and sobbed as though his great expanding heart would burst. The poor woman was unprepared for this. Startled and full of many doubts and fears, she sobbed too as she passed her hand fondly over his hair and drew it out in curls; holding her head away, lest the tears should fall—an evil omen—upon those beloved locks. She had expected to surprise him, but Jean, who saw nothing noble in her own long-loving sacrifice, had not anticipated this.

There were nearly two hundred of these precious bits of paper; for Eben's wages had increased of late, and he too had some little savings of his own; so, with a bold heart, the young sailor took his way that very night to John Horsburgh's hospitable fireside. That Annie shrank into her corner Eben did not wonder, nor was he discouraged when he saw with what sudden variations of colour she listened to his conversation with the others; for Mrs. Horsburgh and Katrine, again in for "half a minute," fell upon him with enthusiasm ere he had well entered the room.

"Eh, man, if ye had but been here when the word came about that villain of a French ship!" cried Katrine; "no a lad or lass about the town but was daft for Eben. But if I had been you, would I no have ta'en the commission, and come hame with a cutlass at my side and a grand uniform, like the captain at the Elie? I would no'er have been done fighting after I anee took a ship, if it had been me."

"I've nae great heart to killing decent men," said Eben; "I wasna to ken which were ne'er-do-wells and which had wives and bairns at hame. Shedding blood is ill pastime; I would rather face the wildest sea that ever ran than a man that got his death at my hand."

"He aye had such a tender heart," said big Mrs. Horsburgh; "but I mind how ye liekit Johnnie Rodger, Eben, for meddling with Annie, when you were a' bairns at the schule. But now ye're hame, what will ye turn your hand to now?"

"If I were you, I would ask him if he had a lock of siller," cried the bold Katrine. "Man, Eben, just tell me!"

"I'm no to complain of," said Eben, with a glow of pleasure at his heart which all the gold in the world could not have brought. "I have nae an empty hand, Katrine, to begin with anee mair; and if I can, I'll set up a house in Anster afore I sail again. I've word of a bonnie wco sloopie—no so little, either—that they'll make me skipper of, the morn; and if I prosper a' way else—"

Bursting from them with a shrill "Hurrah!" Katrine ran to call her husband to join her in exultation over Eben's hopes.

"Them that have siller may buy land," said Mrs. Horsburgh, in vague necessity of saying something; and Annie, startled out of her corner, withdrew altogether, trembling, disquieted, and afraid she knew not why.

But Eben Rhymer and John Horsburgh met in a very amicable conference not very long thereafter; the house at the West Brae found its tardy master and its sweet shy mistress on a bright summer-day at last; and Jean Rhymer has lived to see such a flock of gallant sons, and such a fleet of prosperous sloops as never before graced the piers and harbour of Anstruther; and weeps most blessed tears to hear her honoured Eben say in the presence of his children, that all his joy and all his prosperity dates back to the lonely unknown labours of the poor and solitary widow, who once thought her boy was blighted all his life long by the shadow of that sin which, in her wifely love and tender conscience, she believed herself to share.

CROCKERY.

WHEN we estimate valuable things lightly because they are common, it is instructive sometimes to fancy them away, and calmly ask ourselves what the consequences would be were we deprived of them. Suppose, then, the touch of some magician's wand should suddenly deprive the world of all its crockery. I shall base our speculation on the widest